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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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No. 85 JUNE 11TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

Communists, Fascists and National-Socialists have long recognised that youth holds a key position in relation to a new order of society. In this country we have largely failed in the past to realise the importance of the vitality, enthusiasm and concerns of youth for bringing about the fundamental changes in society which are needed. We have tended to regard youth as a disability instead of recognising and turning to account the qualities which youth alone possesses. Perhaps the greatest omission of which as a nation we have been guilty has been the lack of a policy of employment for the rising generation in the most creative years of their growth and development between the ages of 14 and 25. This neglect not only brings a sense of frustration and suffering, but bears disastrous fruit in later life. Many of those who become " unemployables " are men and women who have had an unfortunate employment record in their 'teens.

THE YOUNG ADULT

A good deal has been said in the News-Letter, from the first number onwards, about the neglect by the nation of its adolescents. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust has done a great service in extending the view to the early years of manhood and inquiring into the position of young men between 18 and 25. In 1936 it appointed three special officers to undertake an intensive study over three years of the situation and experiences of young men between those ages, especially of those who were unemployed, in three selected areas—Glasgow, Liverpool and part of South Wales. The coming of the war has prevented the publication of the comprehensive report that was intended, but the results of the investigation in South Wales have recently been published separately under the title *The Young Adult*.[1] The report relates to conditions before the war, but it deserves the earnest attention of those who are thinking about reconstruction.

The study deals with a sample of the young men found in the unemployment queues in the Labour Exchanges. The number of cases investigated was nearly five hundred and at least five separate interviews were held with each. A table showing the average number of months of unemployment at each age year between the ages of 14 and 25 brings out the fact that the experience of unemployment extends through the whole of this twelve year period and that its duration increases from 14 up to the twenty-third year. This means that in the most impressionable years of life, when ambition and enthusiasm are normally at their height, there is shattering disappointment and defeat. The interviews showed that many of those who had suffered from long unemployment had lost the clearness of eye and challenging look that are the proper attributes of young manhood. The confidence, buoyancy and hopefulness of youth were gone. The lowering of personal qualities was one

[1] University of Wales Press Board. 1s.

of the marked effects of being out of work. The contrary effect of employment is summarised in the remark of a mother: " Harry's on top of the world now he's got a regular job."

The evidence shows to how great an extent the fate of many of these young men is inescapably determined by the state of society into which they are born. If you are born into a poor home, as a member of a large family, in a poor neighbourhood, of a father who is largely unemployed, then almost inevitably you will have the minimum of education, receive no training, enter the industrial world through a series of blind alley jobs, and in the end become, like your father, one of the unemployed. A full understanding of the meaning and implications of this is essential, if plans for the future are to have any practical effect. Nothing but the most vigorous action can break the vicious circle; only a reorganisation of society can offer any hope to a new generation.

Many of those who were interviewed spoke of their complete loss of a sense of time. The longer you were unemployed, the less conscious you became of the passing of time. Head teachers reported that it was often the children from the homes of the unemployed that failed to get to school in time. It might be supposed that unemployment provided a heaven-sent opportunity for doing things for which an employed person has insufficient time. But the lack of a sense of time keeps any task from seeming sufficiently worth while to be undertaken at once; there's always to-morrow or the day after. As one of those interviewed put it, " It's like as if you were dead." It was found also that the listlessness produced by unemployment resulted in a notable absence of movement. Walking was a habit that had never been acquired. A further impoverishment of life comes through the loss of friends; not only economic conditions but the self-consciousness and sense of inferiority of the unemployed separate them from those who are fortunate enough to find employment.

Not one of the five hundred disclaimed a connection with religion, Protestant or Roman Catholic. But while the traditional appeal of the Church remains, only a minority had any active connection with it. Only 8 per cent were Church members; the number of those who attended Church as often as once a month was 35 per cent. The decline in Church attendance involves a social as well as a religious loss, for in Wales particularly Church and Chapel have been the chief formative social influence, an intellectual stimulus through the sermon, an opportunity for self-expression through musical activities, the starting place for friendships and the meeting-ground of the sexes. The cause of the decline is not merely unemployment with its financial limitations but the apathy and cynicism which it breeds. The sole reason given in many instances for the dropping of a connection with the Church was: " What does it matter? " There were a few who challenged the Church for its ineffectiveness in combating social evils but they were unrepresentative.

A similar indifference was revealed in regard to politics. Only 3 per cent were found to belong to any political party or organisation, and 8 per cent had no knowledge whatever of political parties. A large proportion answered the question why they took no interest in politics by the counter-question, " What's the use? " Their experience gave them no ground for believing that their participation in affairs would make any difference to an order of things which had proved itself in their most impressionable years so relentless and devastating. The individual can hope to have influence only in a growing society; continuous experience of unemployment conveys the impression of a static universe.

The root of the trouble goes back to the period between 14 and 18. The inquiry produced no evidence of any carefully thought out policy of recruitment for industry. There is *immediate* need of a policy for the young adolescent; in no other way can the problems of the 18-25 age group find a solution. There is urgent need for raising the school-leaving age; for health services and vocational guidance after 14; and for part time education as a training for industry. For those for whom such measures are too late training of a special kind is needed to remedy the omissions of earlier years.

The coming of war has changed completely for the time being the conditions described in this volume. But the report ought to be carefully read by all who are determined that the youth of this country shall be given a chance worthy of the price paid for its defence. The demands of war on youth are bound to make a profound impression on those entering the field of employment. Hundreds of thousands of young people will have to bend their primary energies to the task of war with all its uncertainties for the present and for the future. We owe it to them to take the necessary measures to ensure that, when the period of war service comes to an end, they will find their rightful place in the life of society, and that their children are protected from the experiences which are presented with such vividness in this report. Immediate action is needed to prevent a recurrence of the tragedy which the volume brings home to us.

CONDITIONS IN FRANCE

As we go to press, the situation between this country and France has unhappily become acute. How far public opinion can assert itself the future must show, but a recent visitor to France reports that a few weeks ago the general sentiment was quite out of sympathy with the foreign policy of the Vichy Government. After the shock of defeat the French spirit has begun to reassert itself. The process began much earlier in the occupied zone, where there was direct experience of the invader, but is spreading to the unoccupied zone. It is with conditions in the latter that the writer chiefly deals.

There is still in this part of France a widespread ignorance of what Nazism really is. But, as the country is systematically despoiled of its food and resources, understanding grows, and there are many evidences of a new courage and new vitality. The people are to a large extent behind Marshal Pétain but there is widespread distrust of his government, and the increased collaboration with the conqueror has caused even the popularity of the Marshal to wane. The intelligentsia and workers appear to be firmest in this attitude. The peasants are beginning to awaken to what is at stake. It is members of the well-to-do middle class who most dread a British victory as likely to lead to the return of democracy and endanger their financial interests.

The food situation is grave. There is not as yet actual famine, but serious shortage is increasing, and rapidly rising prices create acute difficulties for the poor. It is the general conviction that the reason for the shortage is the transportation of food to Germany. Practically every one whom the visitor questioned was against the Hoover plan for food relief because it was believed that the food would certainly be taken by the Germans.

The most encouraging developments are in the sphere of youth. The most interesting of these is the increasing influence of a Youth Leaders Training Institute, founded by a group of cavalry officers, who saw in the education of a new generation of leaders the only means of recovery from defeat and hope for the future. They succeeded in getting the support of the Government and the Institute has become the centre of great activity. The leaders of all youth movements spend one or more periods at the Institute, where they engage in manual work, mix with all classes of the population and are given a spiritual preparation for the task of rebuilding the nation. Strong emphasis is laid on the value of personality and the necessity of community.

Among the Roman Catholics there is a strong wave of clericalism, marked by a vehement insistence that national renewal must mean Christian renewal. Some of the ecclesiastical authorities have found it necessary to curb an excessive zeal on the part of some of the clergy, lest it should evoke an anti-clerical reaction. The French Reformed Church had not yet at the time of the visit made any public declaration of its attitude. But a number of parishes have taken a strong and outspoken line on such matters as anti-Semitism and collaboration with Nazism. The Church budget has been met in the unoccupied, and nearly met in the occupied, zone. But the pastors' salaries are pitifully

small. They have not been augmented, though the prices of some essential foods have increased fourfold. It is all the more surprising that in these conditions the amount raised last winter for the work of Christian missions overseas was as large as in previous winters.

MAN'S RELATION TO THE EARTH

It is too much to hope that the attitude described in the following incident reported in a private letter is general, but it is refreshing to come across such wholesome sanity in a mad and disordered world: " A very poor threadbare man asked had I a job for him and in the bitter March wind I put him on to hoe mangolds, his skin showing through his cotton dungarees which were tied round his ankles so as not to show he had nothing on except his boots. He worked for a week and I said would 35s. be alright. He snorted I could keep my 35s., so, knowing it was a beastly job, I said what did he want. ' Thirty-five shillings,' he growled, ' I'll not take it—you can't afford it and the land can't carry it —give me 25s.,' and he was penniless, hungry, and yet ' the land can't carry it ' was what mattered, not his need nor my affording. None of the real people here care a hoot who your father was, what your bank balance is, nor how you live; only how you do your land. It's something deep down, a sense of a trust of life you are accountable for and judged by."

THE POWER OF OBEDIENCE

In these difficult times many of us find ourselves in situations in which the only way out is that suggested in the words of St. Teresa: " I know the power obedience has of making things easy which seem impossible."

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.